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C O N F I D E N T I A L TAIPEI 001308

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#)  
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT LEE TENG-HUI ON BEEF,  
DISPPOINTMENT IN MA AND TAIWAN POLITICS

REF: TAIPEI 1303

Classified By: AIT Director Bill Stanton for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a November 4 introductory meeting with the Director, former President Lee Teng-hui mainly attributed the current impasse on U.S. beef imports to the Kuomintang (KMT) administration's failure to inform Taiwan's people of its plans. The public needed to be assured that the imported beef would be safe to consume but the administration had not clearly detailed how it would guarantee such safety. Lee criticized President Ma Ying-jeou's leadership and expressed disappointment with the overall current state of Taiwan politics, including the behavior of Chen Shui-bian, but did not offer a clear way to improve the situation. End summary.

Lee Dissects Where Ma Went Wrong on U.S. Beef  
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¶2. (C) Former President Lee Teng-hui shared his views on the current impasse on Taiwan's plans to import U.S. beef (reftel) with the Director during their November 4 introductory meeting. Lee maintained it was very important to safeguard people's health and it would be fine to import U.S. beef products as long as they did not pose health risks. The political uproar over beef was primarily due to the fact that the KMT administration failed to make its position clear to the people. It did not provide details on how it would ensure that such imports would be safe to consume. Instead, its actions and words confused the public.

Dishes Out Criticism of Ma  
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¶3. (C) The handling of the beef issue showcased problems with President Ma Ying-jeou's administration and leadership, Lee asserted. The administration continued to operate in secrecy, feeling no need to report its actions to others. Lee also criticized Ma as a leader, noting that he was "very clean" (of corruption), but stating that he lacked ability. One of Ma's downfalls was that he was out of touch with the Taiwan people. Lee emphasized the need for Ma and his administration to speak to the people and clearly detail and explain their actions and repeatedly asked the Director to convey this advice to Ma.

And on the DPP  
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¶4. (C) Lee's disappointment in Taiwan politics was not limited to the KMT and Ma but also included the opposition Democratic Progressive Party. Lee briefly singled out former President Chen Shui-bian's corruption problems. When asked how Taiwan could improve its political situation, Lee said

that the constitution should be amended but did not provide further details.

Comment

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¶5. (C) The 86-year old Lee clearly remains interested in Taiwan politics but is on the sidelines, as evidenced by him imploring the Director to pass advice to Ma. During the hour-plus meeting with the Director, the friendly Lee spent considerable time recalling Taiwan's political history. Lee keeps healthy by golfing twice a week and managing his diabetes with daily insulin shots and, according to him, not always listening to his doctor's recommendations.  
STANTON